

Short Stories with Peter: Hoichi the Earless by Lafcadio Hearn (Abridged B1–B2 Level)

English learning resource · EN

Full episode script · English

69 lines

Study task: Listen again and notice the expressions you studied.

Welcome to Short Stories with Peter from Your English Toolbox.

I am Peter.

Tonight, a blind musician will perform before a magnificent court that he cannot see.

But the sounds around him are hiding a terrible truth.

This Japanese ghost story was collected and retold by Lafcadio Hearn in Kwaidan, first published in 1904.

Its original English title is The Story of Mimi-Nashi-Hoichi, often known as Hoichi the Earless.

Centuries ago, the Heike clan lost a great sea battle at Dan-no-ura in Japan.

The young Emperor Antoku died with many members of his court, and people said their spirits still wandered the coast.

Near their graves stood a Buddhist temple called Amidaji.

A blind young musician named Hoichi lived there under the care of a kind priest.

Hoichi played the biwa, a traditional Japanese lute, and nobody told the story of Dan-no-ura better.

One hot summer night, the priest was away, and Hoichi sat alone on the temple veranda.

Near midnight, heavy footsteps crossed the garden and stopped in front of him.

Hoichi!

I am blind, so I cannot know who is calling me.

There is nothing to fear.

My lord has heard of your skill, so bring your biwa and come with me.

The stranger sounded like an armed samurai, and his command was not easy to refuse.

He guided Hoichi through a great gate and into what seemed to be an enormous palace.

Hoichi heard fine clothes rustling and noble voices speaking softly around him.

Recite the battle of Dan-no-ura, for its sorrow is the deepest.

Hoichi played until his biwa seemed to become the sea, the ships, and the clash of battle.

When he described the death of the emperor and his people, the whole court cried out and wept.



Our lord wishes you to return for six more nights.

You must keep these visits to yourself.

Hoichi returned before dawn, and the samurai came for him again the following night.

When the priest discovered his absence, he became worried.

Where have you been, my friend?

Please forgive me, but it was private business.

The answer did not sound like Hoichi, so the priest ordered two servants to follow him that night.

In the rain, they lost him on the road, but they heard furious music coming from the cemetery.

They found Hoichi sitting alone before Emperor Antoku's tomb.

Pale ghost lights burned above the graves, but there was no palace and no living audience.

How dare you interrupt me before this noble court?

The servants carried him back, and the priest made him tell the whole story.

You were not in a palace, Hoichi.

You were sitting among the tombs of the dead.

By obeying those spirits, you have fallen into their power.

Before sunset, the priest and his assistant covered Hoichi's body with the words of a holy Buddhist text.

The writing was meant to make every covered part of him invisible to the dead.

Whatever happens tonight, do not answer and do not move.

Hoichi sat on the veranda and waited in silence.

At last, the iron footsteps returned.

Hoichi!

Hoichi held his breath and remained perfectly still.

Hoichi!

The samurai stepped closer, searching the darkness where the musician sat.

The biwa is here, but I can see only two ears.

I will take them to my lord as proof that I found him.

An iron hand seized Hoichi's ears, and pain flashed through him.

He did not cry out, and the heavy footsteps finally disappeared.

Before sunrise, the priest returned and found Hoichi badly injured but alive.

My poor friend, we covered your whole body with the holy text, but we left out your ears.



Hoichi recovered, and the spirits never troubled him again.

The adventure made him famous, and people came from far away to hear him play.

From that time on, he was known as Mimi-Nashi-Hoichi, Hoichi the Earless.

To be taken in means to be deceived by something that seems real.

Hoichi is taken in by the sounds of a palace and a noble court.

To keep something to yourself means not to tell other people about it.

The court lady orders Hoichi to keep his visits to himself.

To hold your breath means to stop breathing briefly, often because you are afraid or waiting.

Hoichi holds his breath when the samurai calls his name.

To leave something out means to forget or choose not to include it.

The priest's assistant leaves out Hoichi's ears when writing the protective text.

Whatever happens introduces an instruction that remains true in every possible situation.

At what moment should Hoichi have realised that the palace was not real?

You can find the complete transcript, translations in several languages, and a vocabulary guide on our website, yourenglishtoolbox.com.

There is a direct link to the episode page and all its resources in this episode description.

Thank you for listening.

